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LIFE AND PRINCIPLES

OF

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

BY

Hon. SCHUYLER COLFAX.

Life and Principles

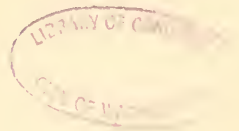
OF

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

BY

Hon. SCHUYLER COLFAX.

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[MR. COLFAX, by invitation of the Christian Commission, repeated this address at Bryan Hall, Chicago, on Sabbath, April 30th, to an audience which crowded the Hall an hour before the time of its delivery. As he said many things there extemporaneously, in addition to his manuscript which was printed in the *Chicago Tribune*, he has revised it, making these additions.]

LIFE AND PRINCIPLES

OF

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

OVER two centuries and a half have passed away since the ruler of any great Nation of the world has fallen by the murderous attack of an assassin; and for the first time in our history there is blood on the Presidential chair of our Republic. Death is almost always saddening. The passing away of some dear friend from our earthly sight for ever, fills the heart with sorrow. When it strikes down one who fills honorably a position of influence and power, as in the case of our two Presidents who died of disease in the White House, the sincerest grief is felt throughout the land. But when this affliction is aggravated by death coming through the hand of a murderer, it is *not* strange that the wave of wo sweeps gloomily over a nation, which sits down to mourn in sackcloth, its pulses of business stilled, feeling in every individual heart as if there was one dead at our own hearth-stones. It seems, too, as if this wicked deed were intensified, in all its horror,

by every attendant circumstance. The fatal shot was fired on the very day when the Nation's flag was again unfurled in triumph over that fort in Charleston harbor, which, in four years' time, had been the cradle and the grave of the rebellion. It was at an hour when the death of the President could not be of the slightest avail to the treasonable conspiracy against the Republic, which its military leaders acknowledged at last was powerless and overthrown. And it was aimed, alas, with too sure a hand, at the life of that one man in the Government whose heart was tenderest towards the would-be assassins of the Nation's life.

You may search history, ancient and modern, and when the task is ended, all will concede that Abraham Lincoln was the most merciful ruler who ever put down a powerful rebellion. He had so won the hearts of the people, and so entwined himself in their regard and affection, that he was the only man living who could have stood in the breach between the leaders of this iniquity and the wrath of the country they had plunged into bloody war. Feeling, as so many did, that his kindly heart almost forgot justice in its throbbings for mercy, yet, knowing his unfaltering devotion to his country, his inflexible adherence to principle, his unyielding determination for the restoration of our national unity, there was a trust in him, almost filial in its loving confidence, that whatever he should finally resolve on would prove in the end to be for the best. Had he been an unforgiving ruler; had his daily practice been to sit in his high place, and there administer with unrelenting severity the penalties of offended law; had he proclaimed his resolution to consign all the plotters against

his country to the gallows they had earned, we might have understood why the rebel assassins conspired against his life. But no assassination in history—not even that of Henry IV., of France, for which Ravaillac was torn in pieces by horses, nor William of Orange—approximates in utter unpalliated infamy to this.

In the midst of the national rejoicings over the assured triumph of the national cause, with illuminations and bon-fires blazing in every town, and the merry peal of the festive bell in every village, our cities blossoming with flags, our hearts beating high with joy, the two great armies of Grant and Lee fraternizing together after their long warfare, and exulting together over the return of peace, we were brought, in a single moment, from the utmost heights of felicity to the deepest valleys of lamentation. No wonder that rebel generals acknowledged that it sent down their cause, through all the coming centuries, to shameless dishonor. For, disguise it, as some may seek to do, behind the form of the assassin, as his finger pulled the fatal trigger, looms up the dark and fiendish spirit of the rebellion; which, baffled in its work of assassinating the nation's life, avenged itself on the life of him who represented the nation's contest and the nation's victory. As surely as the infamous offer of twenty-five thousand crowns by Philip of Spain to whomsoever would rid the world of the pious William of Orange, the purest and best-loved ruler of his times, who, by a striking coincidence, was called Father William, as we called our beloved President Father Abraham—as surely as this public offer, with its false denunciations of William's offences, inspirited the murderous

Balthazar to shoot him through the body—so surely are the chiefs of this gigantic rebellion of our times responsible for the fatal bullet that carried death to our Chief Magistrate, and filled the land with unavailing sorrow.

Unrebuked by them, history repeated itself in the following infamous proffer, published in the *Selma, Alabama, Dispatch* of last December, and copied approvingly into other rebel organs:

“ONE MILLION DOLLARS WANTED, TO HAVE PEACE BY THE 1ST OF MARCH.—If the citizens of the Southern Confederacy will furnish me with the cash, or good securities for the sum of one million dollars, I will cause the lives of Abraham Lincoln, William H. Seward, and Andrew Johnson to be taken by the first of March next. This will give us peace, and satisfy the world that cruel tyrants cannot live in a ‘land of liberty.’ If this be not accomplished, nothing will be claimed beyond the sum of fifty thousand dollars in advance, which is supposed to be necessary to reach and slaughter the three villains.

“I will give, myself, one thousand dollars toward this patriotic purpose.

“Every one wishing to contribute, will address Box X, Cahawba, Ala.

“December 1, 1864.”

You will not fail to remember that these very three, thus named, were to have been murdered on that fatal night; and that when Booth was captured, he was fleeing in that very direction.

And, to fix upon them the brand, ineffaceably and forever, as the miscreant leaped upon the stage, his shout of Virginia’s motto, “SIC SEMPER TYRANNIS,” with his own addition, “The South is avenged,” proclaims to the civilized world, which will be filled with horror at the deed, as well as to posterity, which will ever loathe the crime and the cause for whose interests it was committed, the authorship

of this unparalleled atrocity. It seems, however, but a natural sequel to the infamous plot to murder him as he passed through Baltimore when first elected; to the brutalities on our dead soldiers at Bull Run, burying them face downwards, and carving up their bones into trinkets; to the piracies on the high seas, and attempts to burn women and children to death in crowded hotels and theatres; to Fort Pillow massacres, and the systematic and inexpiable starvation of thousands of Union prisoners in their horrid pens.

I can scarcely trust myself to attempt the portraiture of our martyred chief, whose death is mourned as never man's was mourned before; and who, in all the ages that may be left to America, while time shall last, will be enshrined in solemn memory with the Father of the Republic which he saved. How much I loved him personally, I cannot express to you. Honored always by his confidence; treated ever by him with affectionate regard; sitting often with him familiarly at his table; his last visitor on that terrible night; receiving his last message, full of interest to the toiling miners of the distant West; walking by his side from his parlor to his door, as he took his last steps in that Executive Mansion he had honored; receiving the last grasp of that generous and loving hand, and his last, last good by; declining his last kind invitation to join him in those hours of relaxation which incessant care and anxiety seemed to render so desirable, my mind has since been tortured with regrets that I had not accompanied him. If the knife which the assassin had intended for Grant had not been wasted, as it possibly would not have been, on one of so much less importance in our national affairs, per-

chance a sudden backward look at that eventful instant might have saved that life, so incalculably precious to wife and children and country; or, failing in that, might have hindered or prevented the escape of his murderer. The willingness of any man to endanger his life for another's is so much doubted that I scarcely dare to say how willingly I would have risked my own to preserve his, of such priceless value to us all. But if you can realize that it is sweet to die for one's country, as so many scores of thousands, from every State and county and hamlet, have proved in the years that are past, you can imagine the consolation there would be to any one, even in his expiring hours, to feel that he had saved the land from the funereal gloom which, but a few days ago, settled down upon it from ocean to ocean, and from capitol to cabin, at the loss of one for whom even a hecatomb of victims could not atone.

Of this noble-hearted man, so full of genial impulses, so self-forgetful, so utterly unselfish, so pure and gentle and good, who lived for us, and at last died for us, I feel how inadequate I am to portray his manifold excellencies—his intellectual worth—his generous character—his fervid patriotism. Pope celebrated the memory of Robert Harley, the Earl of Oxford, a privy counsellor of Queen Anne, who himself narrowly escaped assassination, in lines that seem prophetic of Mr. Lincoln's virtues:—

“A soul supreme, in each hard instance tried;
Above all pain, all anger, and all pride,
 The rage of power, the blast of public breath,
 The lust of lucre, and the dread of death.”

No one could ever convince the President that he was

in danger of violent death. Judging others by himself, he could not realize that any one could seek his blood. Or he may have believed, as Napoleon wrote to Jerome, that no public man could effectually shield himself from the danger of assassination. Easier of access to the public at large than had been any of his predecessors; admitting his bitterest enemies to his reception room alone, restive under the cavalry escort which Secretary Stanton insisted should accompany him last summer in his daily journeys between the White House and his summer residence, at the Soldier's Home, several miles from Washington, at a time, too, as since ascertained in the details of this long organized plot, discovered since his death, when it was intended to gag and handcuff him and to carry him to the rebel capitol as a hostage for their recognition; sometimes escaping from their escort by anticipating their usual hour of attendance; walking about the grounds unattended; he could not be persuaded that he run any risk whatever. Being at City Point after the evacuation of Richmond, he determined to go thither, not from idle curiosity, but to see if he could not do something to stop the effusion of blood and hasten the Peace for which he longed. The ever watchful Secretary of War hearing of it, implored him by telegraph not to go, and warned him that some lurking assassin might take his life. But, armed with his good intentions—alas, how feeble a shield they proved against the death blow afterwards—he went, walked fearlessly and carelessly through the streets—met and conferred with a rebel leader who remained there; and when he returned to City Point telegraphed to his faithful friend and consti-

tutional adviser, who till then had feared, as we all did at that time, for his life:—

“I received your dispatch last night; went to Richmond this morning, and have just returned. ABRAHAM LINCOLN.”

When I told him, on that last night how uneasy all had been at his going, he replied, pleasantly and with a smile, (I quote his exact words:)

“Why, if any one else had been President, and had gone to Richmond, I would have been alarmed too; but I was not scared about myself a bit.”

If any of you have ever been at Washington, you will remember the footpath lined and embowered with trees leading from the back door of the War Department to the White House. One night, and but recently, too, when, in his anxiety for news from the army, he had been with the Secretary in the Telegraph Office of the Department, he was about starting home at a late hour by this short route. Mr. Stanton stopped him and said, “You ought not to go that way; it is dangerous for you even in the daytime, but worse at night.” Mr. Lincoln replied, “I don’t believe there’s any danger there, day or night.” Mr. Stanton responded solemnly, “Well, Mr. President, you shall not be killed returning the dark way from my department while I am in it; you must let me take you round by the avenue in my carriage.” And Mr. Lincoln, joking the Secretary on his imperious military orders, and his needless alarm on his account, as he called it, entered his carriage, and was driven by the well-lighted avenue to the White House.

And thus he walked through unseen dangers, without

“the dread of death;” his warm heart so full of good will, even to his enemies, that he could not imagine there was any one base enough to slay him; and the death-dealing bullet was sped to its mark in a theatre, where, but little over an hour before, he had been welcomed as he entered, by a crowded audience rising, and with cheers and waving of handkerchiefs, honoring him with an ovation of which any one might well be proud. Some regret that he was there at all. But, to all human appearance, he was safer there, by far, than in his own reception room, where unknown visitors so often entered alone. He found there a temporary respite occasionally from the crowds who thronged his ante-rooms—relaxation from the cares and perplexities which so constantly oppressed him, keeping his mind under the severest tension, like the bent bow, till it almost lost its spring—and, on this fatal night, to be so black a one hereafter in our calendar, going with reluctance, and, as he expressed it to Mr. Ashman and myself, only because Gen. Grant, who had been advertised with himself, to be present, had been compelled to leave the city, and he did not wish to disappoint those who would expect to see him there.

To those who have expressed these regrets that the murderer found him in a theatre, let me further add, that, by the etiquette of Washington, the President is prohibited from making or returning calls, except in the case of the dangerous illness of some intimate friend. If he made one social visit, the thousands whom he could not call on, and especially distinguished strangers from abroad, would feel the discrimination. And hence, a President, not able to

enjoy a social evening at some friend's residence, as all of us can, must remain within the four walls of the White House, or seek relaxation from the engrossing cares which always confront him there from sunrise till midnight, at some public place of amusement. I remember, that, when we heard of those bloody battles of the Wilderness which any one less persistent than General Grant would have regarded as reverses that justified retreat, Mr. Lincoln went to the opera, saying:—

“People may think strange of it, but I *must* have some relief from this terrible anxiety, or it will kill me.”

Of the many thousands of persons I have met in public or private life, I cannot call to mind a single one who exceeded him in calmness of temper, in kindness of disposition, and in overflowing generosity of impulse. I doubt if his most intimate associate ever heard him utter bitter or vindictive language. He seemed wholly free from malignity or revenge; from ill will or injustice. Attacked ever so sharply, you all remember that he never answered railing with railing. Criticised ever so unjustly, he would reply with no word of reproof, but patiently and uncomplainingly, if he answered at all, strive to prove that he stood on the rock of right. When from the halls of Congress or elsewhere, his most earnest opponents visited the White House with business, they would be met as frankly, listened to as intently, and treated as justly as his most earnest friends. It could be said of him as Pyrrhus said of Fabricius when the latter, though in hostile array, exposed to his enemy the treachery of his physician, who proffered to poison him: “It is easier to turn the sun from his career

than Fabricius from his honesty."—Men of all parties will remember, when the exciting contest of last fall ended in his triumphant re-election, his first word thereafter, from the portico of the White House, was that he could not, and would not exult over his countrymen who had differed from his policy.

And thus he ruled, and thus he lived, and thus he died. The wretch who stood behind him and sent his bullet crashing through that brain, which had been devising plans of reconciliation with the country's deadly foes, as he leaped upon the stage and exulted over the death of him whom he denounced as a tyrant, uttered as foul a falsehood as the lying witnesses who caused the conviction and the crucifixion of the Son of Man, on the same Good Friday, nearly two thousand years ago. I would not compare the human with the Divine, except in that immeasurable contrast of the finite with the infinite. But his whole life proves to me that if he could have had a single moment of consciousness and of speech, his great heart would have prompted him to pray for those who had plotted for his blood, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

He bore the nation's perils, and trials and sorrows, ever on his mind. You knew him, in a large degree, by the illustrative stories, of which his memory and his tongue were so prolific, using them to point a moral, or to soften discontent at his decisions; but this was the mere badinage which relieved him for the moment from the heavy weight of public duties and responsibilities under which he often wearied. Those whom he admitted to his confidence, and

with whom he conversed of his feelings, knew that his inner life was chequered with the deepest anxiety and most discomfoting solicitude. Elated by victories for the cause which was ever in his thoughts, reverses to our arms cast a pall of depression over him. One morning, over two years ago, calling upon him on business, I found him looking more than usually pale and care-worn, and inquired the reason. He replied, with the bad news he had received at a late hour the previous night, which had not yet been communicated to the press, adding that he had not closed his eyes or breakfasted; and, with an expression I shall never forget, he exclaimed:

“How willingly would I exchange places, to-day, with the soldier who sleeps on the ground in the Army of the Potomac.”

He was as free from deceit as guile. He had one peculiarity which often misled those with whom he conversed. When his judgment, which acted slowly, but which was almost immovable as the eternal hills when settled, was grasping some subject of importance, the arguments against his own desire seemed uppermost in his mind; and in conversing upon it, he would present these arguments to see if they could be rebutted. He thus often surprised both friend and foe in his final decisions. Always willing to listen to all sides till the last possible moment; yet, when he put down his foot, he never took a backward step. Once speaking of an eminent statesman, he said:

“When a question confronts him, he always and naturally argues it from the stand-point of which is the better policy; but with me,” he added, “my only desire is to see what is right.”

And this is the key to his life. His parents left Kentucky for Indiana, in his childhood, on account of slavery in the former state; and he thus inherited a dislike for that institution. As he said recently to Gov. Bramlette, of his native State, "If slavery be not wrong, nothing is wrong." Moving to Illinois, he found the prejudice there against anti-slavery men, when he entered on public and professional life, more intense than in any other free State in the Union. But he never dissembled, never concealed his opinions. Entering, in 1858, on that great contest with his political rival, but personal friend, Judge Douglas, which attracted the attention of the whole Union, he startled many of his friends by the declaration of his conviction that the Union could not permanently endure half slave and half free—that ultimately it would be either the one or the other, or be a divided house that could not stand—that he did not expect the Union to be dissolved, or the house to fall, but that it would cease to be divided—and that the hope of the Republic was in staying the spread of slavery, that the public mind might rest in the hope of its ultimate extinction. And though he coupled this with declarations against Congressional interference with it in existing States, it was not popular, and kept him in the whole canvass upon the defensive. But to every argument against it, his calm reply was, in substance, "Such is my clear conviction, and I cannot unsay it."

His frankness in expressing unpopular opinions, was manifested, also, when in Southern Illinois, before an audience almost unanimously hostile to the sentiment, he declared, in the same close and doubtful contest, that, when

the Declaration of Independence proclaimed that all men were created free and equal, it did not mean white men alone, but negroes as well; and that their rights to life, liberty, and happiness, were as inalienable as the noblest of the land. He claimed no power over State laws in other States which conflicted with these rights, or curtailed them; but with unfaltering devotion to his conscientious conviction, and regardless of its effects on his political prospects, he never wavered in his adherence to this truth.

And yet, when elected President of the United States, he executed the Fugitive Slave Law, because his oath of office as the Executive, in his opinion, required it. When urged to strike at slavery under the war power, he replied, in a widely-published letter:

“My paramount object is to save the Union, and I would save it in the shortest way. If I could save the Union without freeing any slaves, I would do it. If I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and if I could do it by freeing some and letting others alone, I would also do that. But I intend no modification of my oft-expressed wish that all men every where could be free.”

And, when at last the hour arrived; when, in his honest opinion, the alternative between the death of slavery and the death of the Union confronted him, then, and not till then, he struck at the cause of all our woes with the battle-axe of the Union. Signing that immortal proclamation, which made him the Liberator of America, on the afternoon of January 1st, 1863, after hours of New Years hand-shaking, he said to me and other friends, that night:

“The signature looks a little tremulous, for my hand was tired, but my

resolution was firm. I told them, in September, if they did not return to their allegiance, and cease murdering our soldiers, I would strike at this pillar of their strength. And now the promise shall be kept; and not one word of it will I ever recall."

And the promise was kept, and every word of it has stood. Thank God, when slavery and treason benumbed that hand in death, they could not destroy the noble instrument to which that hand had given a life that shall never die. A great writer said, that, when Wilberforce stood at the bar of God, he held in his hands the broken shackles which on earth had bound hundreds of thousands of his fellow-men. But, when baffled treason hurried Abraham Lincoln into the presence of his Maker, he bore with him the manacles of four millions whom he had made free—fetters that no power on God's footstool is strong enough to place again on their enfranchised limbs.

No man, in our era, clothed with such vast power, has ever used it so mercifully. No ruler, holding the keys of life and death, ever pardoned so many and so easily. When friends said to him they wished he had more of Jackson's sternness, he would say, "I am just as God made me, and cannot change." It may not be generally known that his doorkeepers had standing orders from him, that no matter how great might be the throng, if other Senators and Representatives had to wait, or be turned away without an audience, he must see, before the day closed, every member who came to him with a petition for the saving of life. One night, in February, I left all other business to ask him to respite the son of a constituent, who was sentenced to be shot, at Davenport, for desertion. He heard the story

with his usual patience, though he was wearied out with incessant calls, and anxious for rest, and then replied :

“Some of our Generals complain that I impair discipline and subordination in the army, by my pardons and respites, but it makes me rested, after a day’s hard work, if I can find some good excuse for saving a man’s life, and I go to bed happy as I think how joyous the signing of my name will make him and his family and his friends.”

And with a happy smile beaming over that care-furrowed face, he signed that name that saved that life.

But Abraham Lincoln was not only a good and a just and a generous and a humane man. I could not be just to that well-rounded character of his without adding that he was also a praying man. He has often said that his reliance in the gloomiest hours was on his God, to whom he appealed in prayer, although he never had become a professor of religion. To a clergyman who asked him if he loved his Saviour, he replied, and he was too truthful for us to doubt the declaration :

“When I was first inaugurated, I did not love Him; when God took my son, I was greatly impressed, but still I did not love Him; but when I stood upon the battle-field of Gettysburg, I gave my heart to Christ, and I can now say, I do love the Saviour.”

Two of my fellow-members, Messrs. Wilson of Iowa and Casey of Kentucky, called on him at one of these periods when reverses had dispirited the people. Conversing about the prospects of our country, one of them said: “Well, Mr. President, I have faith that Providence is with us; and if the people are but true to the cause, all will be right.”

Mr. Lincoln gravely replied, with deep solemnity in his tone :

“I have a higher faith than yours. I have faith, not only that God is with our cause, but that he will control the hearts of the people so that they will be faithful to it too.”

The Bible was always in his reception room. I have doubted the report that he read an hour in it every day, for he often came direct from his bed to his reception room, so anxious was he to accommodate members who had important business, and it would sometimes be two or three hours before he would playfully say to some friend whose turn had come, “Won’t you stay here till I get some breakfast?” But he must have read the Bible considerably, for he often quoted it. One day that I happened to come in he said, “Mr. —— has just been here attacking one of my Cabinet, but I stopped him with this text,” and he read from the Proverbs a text I had never heard quoted before, as follows: “Accuse not a servant to his master.”

You cannot fail to have noticed the solemn and sometimes almost mournful strain that pervades many of his addresses. When he left Springfield in 1861 to assume the Presidency, his farewell words were as follows:

“MY FRIENDS:—No one not in my position can appreciate the sadness I feel at this parting. To this people I owe all that I am. Here I have lived more than a quarter of a century; here my children were born, and here one of them lies buried. *I know not how soon I shall see you again.* A duty devolves upon me, which is, perhaps, greater than that which has devolved upon any other man since the days of Washington. He never would have succeeded except for the aid of Divine Providence, upon which

he at all times relied. I feel that I cannot succeed without the same Divine aid which sustained him, and on the same Almighty Being I place my reliance for support; and I hope that you, my friends, will all pray that I may receive that Divine assistance, without which I cannot succeed, but with which success is certain. Again I bid you all an affectionate farewell."

Before that murderous blow closed his eyes in death, that "success" for which he had struggled was assured—that "duty" devolved upon him had been performed. But the friends to whom, with "the sadness he felt at parting," he bade this "affectionate farewell," can only look at the lifeless corpse, now slowly borne to their midst.

When, in the same month, he raised the national flag over Independence Hall, at Philadelphia, he said to the assembled tens of thousands:

"It was something in the Declaration of Independence giving liberty, not only to the people of this country, but hope to the world for all coming time. It was that which gave promise that in due time the weights should be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that *all* should have an equal chance. * * * Now, my friends, can this country be saved upon that basis? If it can, I will consider myself one of the happiest men in the world, if I can help to save it. But if this country cannot be saved without giving up that principle, *I was about to say that I would rather be assassinated upon the spot than to surrender it.* I have said nothing but what I am willing to live by, and if it be the pleasure of Almighty God, to die by."

He seemed, as he thus spoke, to have the dark shadow of his violent death before him. But even in its presence he declared that he would rather be assassinated than to surrender a principle; and that while he was willing to

live by it, yet, if it was God's pleasure, he was equally willing to die by it. He was assassinated, but his name and principles will live while history exists and the Republic endures.

So, too, in the conclusion of his first inaugural, he appealed in the language of entreaty and peace to those who had raised their mailed hands against the life of their father-land ;

“ You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the Government, while I have the most ‘solemn one’ to preserve, protect and defend it. The mystic cord of memory, stretching from every battle-field and patriot-grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”

In all my literary reading, I have never found a more beautiful and touching sentence than the one I have just quoted.

In the funeral exercises in the East Room, on the 19th of April, the very anniversary of the day when the blood of murdered Massachusetts soldiers stained the stones of the city of Baltimore, Dr. Gurley quoted the President's solemn reply to a company of clergymen who called on him in one of the darkest hours of the war, when, standing where his lifeless remains then rested, he replied to them in tones of deep emotion :

“ Gentlemen, my hope of success in this great and terrible struggle rests on that immutable foundation, the justice and goodness of God. And when events are very threatening and prospects very dark, I still hope in

some way, which man cannot see, all will be well in the end, because our cause is just and God is on our side."

You cannot have forgotten this impressive invocation with which he closed his Proclamation of Emancipation.

"And, upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution and military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God."

The solemn words of his last Inaugural sound in my ears to-day as I heard them fall from his lips only last month, on the steps of the Capitol. There was no exultation over his own success, though he was the first Northern President who had ever been re-elected. There was no bitterness against the men who had filled our land with new-made graves, and who were striving to stab the nation to its death. There was no confident and enthusiastic prediction of the country's triumph. But with almost the solemn utterances of one of the Hebrew Prophets; as if he felt he was standing, as he was, on the verge of his open grave, and addressing his last official words to his countrymen, with his lips touched by the finger of Inspiration, he said :

"The Almighty has his own purposes. 'Wo unto the world because of offences, for it must needs be that offences come; but wo to that man by whom the offence cometh.' If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offences, which in the providence of God must needs come, but which having continued through His appointed time, he now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the wo due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living

God always attribute to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may soon pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid with another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'

“With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphans, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”

What a portraiture of his own character he unconsciously draws in this closing paragraph:

“With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right.”

And yet they slew him.

As this extraordinary State paper crossed the Atlantic to the Old World, it elicited the most profound interest. Mr. Gladstone, himself the most eloquent of English Statesmen, spoke in the most elevated eulogy of it, saying that it showed a moral elevation which *commanded* the highest respect, adding, in emphatic language:

“I am taken captive by so striking an utterance as this; for I see in it the effect of sharp trial, when rightly borne, to raise men to a higher level of thought and feeling than they could otherwise reach.”

And the *British Standard* declared it—

“The most remarkable thing of the sort ever pronounced by any President of the United States from its first day until now. Its Alpha and Omega is Almighty God, the God of Justice and the Father of Mercies, who is working out the purposes of his love. It is invested with a dignity and pathos which lift it high above every thing of the kind, whether in the Old World or the New.”

Bear with me further, while I quote one letter, when, in the midst of the exciting canvass of last fall, in which he was so deeply interested, during the very week he was being denounced in Chicago as scarcely any man had ever been denounced before, he shut out the thoughts of these cruelly-unjust aspersions, to write in this deeply-impressive strain to a Philadelphia lady, then resident in England:

“EXECUTIVE MANSION, }
WASHINGTON, Sept. 6, 1864. }

“ELIZA B. GURNEY—*My Esteemed Friend*:—I have never forgotten, probably never shall forget, the very impressive occasion, when yourself and friends visited me on a Sabbath forenoon, two years ago, nor has your kind letter, written nearly a year later, ever been forgotten.

“In all it has been your purpose to strengthen my reliance on God. I am much indebted to the good, Christian people of the country for their constant prayers and consolations, and to no one of them more than yourself. The purposes of the Almighty are perfect, and must prevail, though we erring mortals may fail to perceive them in advance.

“We hoped for a happy termination of this terrible war long before this, but God knows best, and has ruled otherwise. We shall acknowledge His wisdom and our own errors therein. Mean while we must work earnestly in the best light He gives us, trusting that so working still conduces to the great end He ordains. Surely he intends some great good to follow this mighty convulsion, which no mortal could stay. Your people—the Friends—have had, and are having very great trial on principles and faith.”

I stop here, in the reading of this letter, to draw your attention to the next sentence, which illustrates Mr. Lincoln's power in stating facts. He seemed to have the ability of taking a great truth, a living principle, or a striking argument, out of all the mists that might be gathered around it, and placing it before you so vividly in a single sentence, that the presentation of it by others would contrast with his, as a picture, flat before your eyes, compares with the figures in the same picture brought out so palpably and life-like under the binocular mystery of the stereoscope. Witness the striking condensation and unanswerable argument of this next sentence:

"Opposed to both war and oppression, they can only practically oppose oppression by war. In this hard dilemma some have chosen one horn, and some the other. For those appealing to me on conscientious grounds, I have done, and shall do the best I can in my own conscience, and my oath to the law. That you believe this I doubt not, and believing it, I shall still receive, for our country and myself, your earnest prayers to our Father in Heaven.

"Your sincere friend, "A. LINCOLN."

Nor should I forget to mention here, that the last act of Congress ever signed by him, was one requiring that the motto, in which he sincerely believed, "In God we trust," should hereafter be inscribed upon all our national coin.

But April came at last, with all its glorious resurrection of spring—that spring which he was not to see ripening into summer. The last sands in the hour-glass of his life were falling. His last moment drew nigh, for his banded assassins, foiled in an attempt to poison him last year, (a plot only discovered since detectives have been tracking

the mysteries of his death,) had resolved, this time, on striking a surer blow. Victory after victory crowned our national armies. A hundred captured rebel banners filled the War Department. Scores of thousands of rebel soldiers had surrendered; and all over the republic, the joyous acclaim of millions hailed the promised land of Peace. But our beloved leader was to enter another land of rest. Thank Heaven, though wicked men may kill the body, they cannot kill the immortal soul. And if the spirits of the good men who have left us, are permitted to look back on the land they loved in life, it is not presumptuous to believe that Washington and Lincoln, from the shining courts above, look down to-day with paternal interest on the nation which, under Providence, the one had founded and the other saved, and which will intertwine their names together in hallowed recollection for ever.

But, in his last hours, all those affectionate traits of character which I have so inadequately delineated, shone out in more than wonted brilliancy. How his kindly heart must have throbbed with joy, as, on the very day before his death, he gladdened so many tens of thousands of anxious minds by ordering the abandonment of the impending, but now not-needed draft! With what generous magnanimity he authorized our heroic Lieutenant-General to proffer terms unparalleled in their liberality, to the Army of Virginia, so long the bulwark of the rebellion. And the last official act of his life was, when learning by telegraph, that very Friday afternoon, that two of the leaders and concoctors of the rebellion were expected to arrive disguised, in a few hours, at one of our ports, to escape to

Europe, he instructed our officers not to arrest them, but let them flee the country. He did not wish their blood, but their associates thirsted for his, and in a few short hours after this message of mercy to save their friends from death sped on the wings of lightning, with wicked hands they slew him. No last words of affection to weeping wife and children did they allow him. No moment's space for prayer to God. But, in order that consciousness might end with the instant, the pistol was held close to the skull, that the bullet might be buried in his brain.

Thus lived and thus died our murdered President. But as the ruffian shot down the pilate at our helm, just as the Ship of State, after all its stormy seas, was sailing prosperously into port, another, whose life, like that of Seward and Stanton, had been marked for that very night of horrors, but who had been saved, sprang to the rudder, and the noble ship holds on her course without a flutter in her canvass or a strain upon her keel. Andrew Johnson, to whom the public confidence was so quickly and worthily transferred, is cast in a sterner mould than he whose place he fills. He has warred on traitors in his mountain home as they have warred on him; and he insists, with this crowning infamy filling up their cup of wickedness, that treason should be made odious, and that mercy to the leaders who engendered it is cruelty to the nation.

The text of Holy Writ which he believes in for them is in the 26th verse of the 7th chapter of Ezra, "Let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to

imprisonment;" and to this do not all loyal hearts respond AMEN?

And thus, though the President is slain, the nation lives. The statesman, who has so successfully conducted our foreign correspondence, as to save us from threatened and endangering complications and difficulties abroad, and who, with the President, leaned ever to mercy's side, so brutally bowie-knifed as he lay helpless on his bed of anguish, is happily to be spared us; and the conspiracy which intended a bloody harvest of six patriots' lives, reaped, with its murderous sickle, but one.

But that one—how dear to all our hearts—how priceless in its worth, how transparent and spotless its purity of character! In the fiery trial to which the nation has been subjected, we have given of the bravest and the best of the land. The South is billowed with the graves where sleep the patriot martyrs of constitutional liberty till the resurrection morn. The vacant chair at the table of thousands upon thousands tells of those, who, inspired by the sublimest spirit of self-sacrifice, have died that the Republic might survive. Golden and living treasures have been heaped up upon our country's altar. But, after all these costly sacrifices had been offered, and the end seemed almost at hand, a costlier sacrifice had to be made; and from the highest place in all the land the victim came. Slaughtered at the moment of victory, the blow was too late to rob him of the grand place he has won for himself in history:

“We know him *now*. All narrow jealousies
Are silent. And we see him as he moved,
How modest, kindly, all compassionate, wise,

With what sublime repression of himself,
And in what limits and how tenderly.
Whose glory was redressing human wrongs,
Not making his high place the lawless perch
Of winged ambition, nor a vantage ground
Of pleasure. But, through all this tract of years,
Wearing the white flower of a blameless life."

Murdered, coffined, buried, he will live with those few immortal names who were not born to die; *live*, as the Father of the Faithful in the times that tried men's souls; *live* in the grateful hearts of the dark-browed race he lifted from under the heel of the oppressor to the dignity of freedom and of manhood; *live* in every bereaved circle which has given father, husband, son or friend to die, as he did, for his country; *live*, with the glorious company of martyrs to liberty, justice and humanity, that trio of Heaven-born principles; *live*, in the love of all beneath the circuit of the sun, who loathe tyranny, slavery and wrong. And, leaving behind him a record that shows how honesty and principle lifted him, self-made as he was, from the humblest ranks of the people to the noblest station on the globe, and a name that shall brighten under the eye of posterity as the ages roll by,

"From the top of fame's ladder he stepped to the sky."



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